Mad in America
SCIENCE, PSYCHIATRY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

On the Brink of Murder Because of an Antidepressant

By **Peter C. Gøtzsche, MD** - March 28, 2024

While going through a divorce in 2012, award-winning documentary filmmaker Katinka Blackford Newman from London was prescribed escitalopram (Cipralex or Lexapro, from Lundbeck). This is a depression pill, but Katinka was not depressed, only distressed, with sleepless nights, when she needed to leave the family home after a 12-year marriage.

The pill nearly killed her and took her away from her kids, which Katinka has described in her book, "The pill that steals lives." She also made a very moving 8-minute film about her own story that I recommend everyone with an interest in psychiatry to see, and she has an interesting homepage, with links to documentaries and with stories about people who killed themselves or others or were seriously harmed by the pills.

Katinka started hallucinating wildly, thinking in very violent images, and imagined she had stabbed herself in the stomach. She took a kitchen knife and lacerated her left arm. She became convinced she had stabbed and killed her two children, Lily and Oscar, 12 and 11 years old, respectively. Nothing really mattered, and it was pure luck that she didn't kill herself or someone else, as she had no sense of reality.

Katinka ended up in a private psychiatric hospital in central London, Florence Nightingale. The psychiatrists didn't realise it was the pill that had made her ill. They diagnosed psychotic depression and forced her to stay and take more drugs.

Oscar says in the film that after three months on antidepressants and antipsychotics, his mom had no emotions and walked around like a robot in a very dirty dressing gown for a whole year.

Katinka couldn't hold a conversation and wasn't interested in anything. The worst thing was that she couldn't feel anything, couldn't even feel any love for her children.

After a year, Katinka was on seven different drugs, including two neuroleptics (olanzapine and quetiapine), a depression pill (fluoxetine), an anti-epileptic (lamotrigine), lithium, a sleeping aid (zopiclone) and a couple of benzodiazepines to be used if the other drugs were not enough to knock her down.

Her psychiatrists insisted she had treatment-resistant depression. They didn't realise they had caused her condition themselves. Who would not become depressed on such a drug cocktail? It is considered malpractice to give more than one neuroleptic simultaneously, which increases mortality for no benefit, and it is also bad medicine to give several minor tranquillisers, and indeed for more than a couple of weeks.

Then, her private insurance ran out, and she was admitted to a public hospital where they stopped all the drugs cold turkey. This was also serious medical malpractice. It is very dangerous to stop psychiatric drugs abruptly, which can cause akathisia, suicide and homicide.

But Katinka's so-called illness disappeared in just three weeks. She was able to love her children again and look them in the eyes.

Oscar says in the film: "All along, I have been saying to everyone: It's the pills. No one would believe that you get medicines, and they would make you crazy and psychotic, and I just thought, this has to stop."

So, a small boy knew what caused his mom's problems while highly paid psychiatrists at a private hospital harmed her indescribably and gave her a totally wrong diagnosis, psychotic and treatment-resistant depression.

At the book launch in 2016, which I attended, Katinka said she was very lucky to be there alive, and not serving a life sentence for killing her children.

As an introduction to her book, I write: "This book describes in vivid detail how ordinary people can become murderers if they take antidepressant drugs and how psychiatry can destroy people. It is a catching personal testimony about what is wrong with psychiatry, its love affair with unscientific diagnoses and harmful drugs, and its blindness towards the fact that what look like psychiatric diseases are often side effects of psychiatric drugs."

A mother in Holland did not have the luck Katinka had. When Katinka published her book, I was an expert witness in a double homicide case in Holland where I emphasised that serious professional malpractice played a crucial role. Aurélie Versluis had killed her two children with a knife while having indisputable symptoms of akathisia on paroxetine (Seroxat or Paxil, from GlaxoSmithKline) but her pleas for help were ignored. After three months on the drug, she became suicidal but instead of withdrawing it, her psychiatrist advised continued use.

Aurélie told two people about nightmares where she slit her children's throats (which she ultimately did, and also tried to commit suicide). Two days prior to

the homicides, she reported to her supervisor that she was ill and told several people that she was not feeling well. She visited her family doctor (who had prescribed paroxetine) with her complaints and her company doctor who dismissed her. Finally, she contacted her psychologist who did not have time for her.

It is a gruesome story. She was not herself, which a forensic psychiatrist confirmed three days after the homicides. And her doctors continued to harm her. They stopped paroxetine cold turkey when she was in the psychiatric penitentiary six months after the homicides, causing serious harm that persisted for five months.

I did my best in court, but the judges failed to understand that those who should have been accused were Aurélie's psychiatrists, not her. She should have been released because of drug-induced insanity. They sentenced her to 9 years in prison, but questions were raised in parliament if the judicial system was too harsh. It surely was. In these cases, it is very rare that judges do anything other than accepting the explanations of the psychiatrists, even though they have a huge conflict of interest when they defend themselves or their colleagues in a system that is sick.

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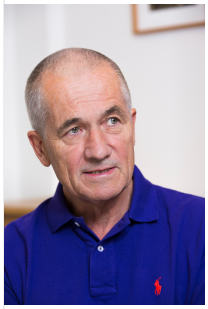

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Peter C. Gøtzsche, MD has published more than 100 papers in the top five general medical journals and his scientific works have been cited over 150,000 times. He has published several books relevant to psychiatry, including *Deadly Psychiatry and Organised Denial*, *Mental Health Survival Kit and Withdrawal from Psychiatric Drugs*, and *Critical Psychiatry Textbook*. He is currently crowdfunding for his Institute for Scientific Freedom with the goal of preserving honesty and integrity in science.